



" **WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** is a fabulous debut and truly a gem of a novel, full of the beauty, tenderness, and poignancy of Black girlhood."
—Deesha Philyaw, author of *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*

WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW

by Kai Harris

"Kai Harris' debut novel is a stirring story of a transformative summer for a Black girl growing up in 1990s Michigan. . . This elegant and eloquent novel is perfect for readers who loved Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*." —*BookPage (Starred review)*

"A story of Black girlhood from a promising new voice in fiction." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Kai Harris's fierce, lyrical writing drew me in from the first page. KB is an unforgettable narrator whose voice comes vibrantly to life through her journey from childhood to adulthood, even as she grapples with the forces that tear families apart and the power that holds them together. This is an extraordinary, powerful debut, and I hope there will be more to come from Harris." —*Abi Daré, New York Times bestselling author of The Girl with the Louding Voice*

"Combining complex characters, writing that instantly penetrates your heart, and the restorative power of nature, *What the Fireflies Knew* is a luminous reminder that sometimes the only true path to healing is through facing our painful histories, and that we don't have to do it alone. With a debut novel this remarkable, Kai Harris is a writer I hope is around for a long, long time." —*Mateo Askaripour, New York Times bestselling author of Black Buck*

"**WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** is sharp and graceful, poignant in its depiction of a family learning to acknowledge what's been broken in order to piece itself back together. Kai Harris beautifully captures what it feels like to be out of place—in a city, in a body, in a family, in the turmoil of adolescence— and then just as gracefully reminds us what it can feel like to find your way back to yourself in spite of everything. This book introduces a bold and necessary new writer, generous in her capacity for holding onto hope without erasing trauma."

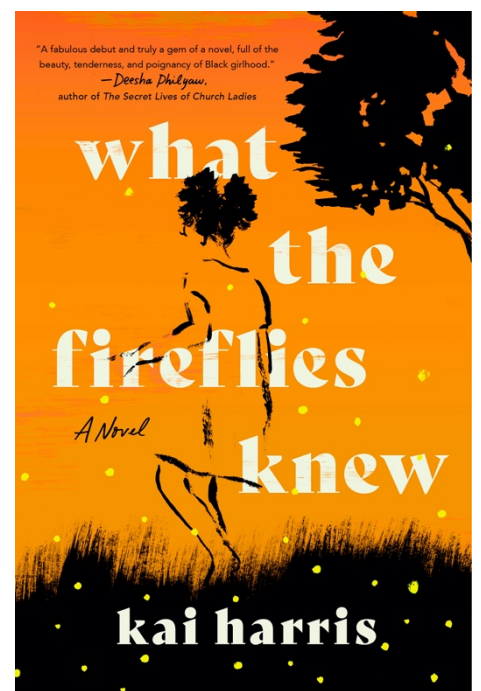
—*Danielle Evans, author of The Office of Historical Corrections and Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*

"In this gorgeous and poignant novel, Kai Harris writes a stunningly crafted tale that explores the beauty and hard truths of life, loss, and survival through the lens of an unforgettable narrator. This story of a young black girl navigating the labyrinth of self and family secrets is told in an authentic voice, filled with well observed details and elegant prose. Harris's first novel showcases her gift as a superb storyteller."

—*Nicole Dennis-Benn, bestselling author of Patsy and Here Comes the Sun*

A beautiful and heartbreakingly honest coming-of-age novel, **WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** by Kai Harris (on-sale February 1, 2022) is the breathtaking inaugural fiction title from Tiny Reparations Books, the new imprint launched by bestselling author Phoebe Robinson in partnership with Plume. The imprint's mission is simple: to publish books that highlight and amplify unique and diverse voices that not only reflect the current conversation, but also pushes it forward. Already an in-house favorite, **WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** presents the unforgettable voice of almost-eleven-year-old KB, as she and her teenage sister, Nia, try over the course of a summer to make sense of their new life with their estranged grandfather after the death of their father and disappearance of their mother.

WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW began as a short story Harris wrote in memory of her own grandfather, who she used to visit with her sister in Lansing, MI during the summer. She wanted to capture the essence of those quiet summers, and what it felt like, looked and sounded and



smelled like, to be a Black girl. In addition to writing fiction for *Guernica*, and other publications, Harris has published poetry, personal essays, and peer-reviewed academic articles on topics related to Black girlhood and womanhood, the slave narrative genre, motherhood, and Black identity. **WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW**, her stunning debut novel, shows the nuance, trauma, and joy of Black girlhood through a simple and poignant tale of a girl's summer—the summer after she lost her father, and the summer before she found herself.

June, 1995. After her father dies of an overdose and the debts incurred from his addiction cause the loss of the family home in Detroit, Kenyatta Bernice (KB) and her teenage sister, Nia, are sent by their overwhelmed mother to live with their estranged grandfather in Lansing. Over the course of a single, sweltering summer, KB attempts to get her bearings in a world that has turned upside down—a father who is labeled a fiend; a mother whose smile no longer reaches her eyes; a sister, once her best friend, who has crossed the threshold of adolescence and suddenly wants nothing to do with her; a grandfather who is grumpy and silent; the white kids across the street who are friendly, but only sometimes. And all of them are keeping secrets. Pinballing between resentment, abandonment, and loneliness, KB is forced to carve out a different identity for herself and find her own voice. As she examines the jagged pieces of her recently shattered world, she learns that while some truths cut deep, a new life—and a new KB—can be built from the shards.

Capturing all the vulnerability, perceptiveness, and inquisitiveness of a young Black girl on the cusp of puberty, Harris's prose perfectly inhabits that hazy space between childhood and adolescence, where everything that was once familiar develops a veneer of strangeness when seen through newer, older eyes. Through KB's disillusionment and subsequent discovery of her own power, **WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** poignantly reveals that heartbreaking but necessary component of growing up—the realization that loved ones can be flawed, sometimes significantly so, and that the perfect family we all dream of looks different up close.

WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW

By Kai Harris

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KaiHarrisWrites.com

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kai Harris is a writer and educator from Detroit, Michigan, who uses her voice to uplift the Black community through realistic fiction centered on the Black experience. Her work has appeared in *Guernica*, *Kweli Journal*, *Longform*, and the *Killens Review*, amongst others. In addition to fiction, Kai has published poetry, personal essays, and peer-reviewed academic articles on topics related to Black girlhood and womanhood, the slave narrative genre, motherhood, and Black identity. A graduate of Western Michigan University's PhD program, Kai was the recipient of the university's Gwen Frostic Creative Writing Award in Fiction for her short story, "While We Live." Kai now lives in the Bay Area with her husband, three daughters, and dog Tabasco, where she is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Santa Clara University.

About Plume: Founded in 1970, Plume is dedicated to finding and championing a select group of new nonfiction voices in the genres of pop culture, cultural and feminist statements, influencers in the food, wine, and lifestyle space, and humorous and whimsical gift books. Notable recent successes include *New York Times* bestselling authors Amber Share, Trixie Mattel and Katya, and Hannah Shaw. Plume is also home to many perennial classics including Martin Duberman's *Stonewall*, Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods's *The Genius of Dogs*, Bernice McFadden's *Sugar*, August Wilson's *Fences*, Helene Maria Viramontes *Under the Feet of Jesus*, as well as best-selling fiction from Julia Alvarez and Joyce Carol Oates.

About Tiny Reparations Books: Plume has partnered with *New York Times* bestselling author, stand-up comedian, writer, actress, and producer Phoebe Robinson to form Tiny Reparations Books, a highly curated imprint dedicated to publishing both literary fiction and nonfiction as well as essay collections that highlight and amplify unique and diverse voices.